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AUTHOR Buzzanell, Patrice M.

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ABSTRACT

In the midst of tragedy, humans reconsider what they value in life. This reassessment is not only cognitive, but also is embodied and spiritual. Given the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and massive downsizings prior to (and after) this tragedy, many individuals in the United States have come to rethink their priorities in life. One site of struggle for reconceptualizing people's everyday lives as well as communication theory and practice is the nexus of spirituality and career discourses. This paper asks what happens when these discourses collide and how these questionings can assist organizational communication scholars in developing more humane theory and practice. The paper first discusses the discursive approach in organizational communication. Next, it interrogates discourses of spirituality and career to illuminate commonalities and contradictions that then can be used to create organizational communication theory and practice. The paper concludes that, through spirituality, individuals can transform the communicative processes in their workplace as well as address their ongoing needs for meaning. (Contains 63 references.) (NKA)

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RUNNING HEAD: SILENCE OF OUR HEARTS

In the Silence of Our Hearts:

When Spirituality and Career Discourses Collide

Patrice M. Buzzanell
Associate Professor
Dept. of Communication
1366 LAEB 2160
Purdue University
W. Lafayette, IN 47907-1366
765.494.3317/496.1394 (fax)
765.464.8600 (home)
pbuzzanell@sla.purdue.edu

P M Buzzanell

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Abstract

In the midst of tragedy, humans reconsider what they value in life. This reassessment is not only cognitive, but also is embodied and spiritual. Given the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and massive downsizings prior to (and after) this tragedy, many individuals in the United States have come to rethink their priorities in life. One site of struggle for reconceptualizing our everyday lives as well as communication theory and practice is the nexus of spirituality and career discourses. This paper asks what happens when these discourses collide and how these questionings can assist organizational communication scholars in developing more humane theory and practice.

In the Silence of Our Hearts:

When Spirituality and Career Discourses Collide

In the silence of our hearts we can hear whispers of who we might become for ourselves and others if we are brave enough to listen and act. We can hear echoes of times we have made ourselves excruciatingly vulnerable to others—sometimes met in kind by another also willing to peel off years of self- and other-disciplining and expose his or her soul, sometimes met by others who turn away. But in these moments of self-exploration and connection, we find hope for more humane organizational communication theorizing and practice.

The events that befell people directly and remotely associated with the World Trade Center and Pentagon terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, have prompted these kinds of whispers and vulnerabilities in our hearts and souls. In countless national and international media reports as well as listserves, campus vigils, and other forums, individuals have expressed profound sadness, anger, confusion, and needs to find some value in the horrific attacks on a nation and on individual human beings. These questionings and desires--to locate "something good" out of tragedy and to (re)connect with some higher order--are the processes and products of spirituality (Damainakis, 2001; Krone, 2001; Rodriguez, 2001). These questionings and desires often make people feel uncomfortable and rootless. It is no coincidence that President Bush requested that United States and world citizens attend their churches, synagogues, and temples to pray for victims and these victims' and rescue workers' families. For religion, particularly an organized community with years (and often centuries) of theological inquiry and

justification, may provide comfort through answers to questions about the value of lived tragedy and through material and emotional assistance (see Damainakis, 2001).

Although religion may be one source of sense making for people, communication researchers, theorists, and teachers often turn to our professional community and our life's work to find direction in insecure times. The numerous postings on CRTNET after the events of September 11, 2001, attest to our collective meaning making. As some of us correspond with others and search in the silence of our hearts, we may come to question the nature and consequences of our everyday discourses. In general, we routinely orient our lives toward career—whether we conceptualize career as advancement in particular organizations, life-long series of work-related experiences, unfolding narratives about our work choices and experiences, boundaryless (interorganizational and global) careers, or series of employer-employee contracts (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989; Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999; Buzzanell, 2000; Rousseau, 1995; Rousseau & Arthur, 1999; Sullivan, 1999). Career is not simply the theme(s) underlying what work we do and enjoy. Career also functions as an ideology that (re)shapes the ways we organize our time, balance our work and life needs, develop our relationships, and decide mundane aspects of our lives (e.g., whether to relocate, purchase property in a particular location, send children to certain schools or extracurricular activities, and so on).

Because career subsumes much of our public life through its linkages with work, jobs, organizational or institutional memberships, and community activities, career often seems antithetical to spirituality. It is mainly when our ordinary routines are punctured by some event that we perceive to be so significant that our worlds are turned upside

down, that we may turn to spirituality. For instance, the drive toward spirituality has been linked to the increasing fragmentation of our lives and economic insecurities.[1] But the events that turn us toward spirituality need not be negative or newsworthy. We can experience spiritual questionings and desires with the birth of healthy children or with the realization that we have entered into partnership with someone who loves us more than her or his own life. We can experience poetic moments, such as those found in therapeutic dialogues, when individuals release their defenses and truly converse so that entirely new possibilities for living are created (Shotter & Katz, 1999).

The aim of this paper is to describe the struggle that occurs when discourses of spirituality and career collide. In the tensions that emerge through attention to these discourses, we may be able to create more humane organizational communication theorizing and practice. Of importance in reframing organizational communication are questions such as, How can we infuse our organizational communication theorizing and practices with spirituality--not as something added on--but a quality whereby we construct our lives? Is it possible to develop spirituality-centered organizational communication discourse that can lessen the corporate colonization and commodification of our lives?

Discourses of Spirituality and Career

In this section, I discuss the discursive approach in organizational communication. Next, I interrogate discourses of spirituality and career to illuminate commonalities and contradictions that then can be used to create organizational communication theory and practice.

Discoursive Approach in Organizational Communication

Spirituality and career are socially constructed discourses situated in specific socio-economic-historical contexts. Deetz and Mumby (1990) state that discourse is "the concrete practices in which people engage in the process of constituting the meaning systems of their everyday world" (p. 42). Both are (re)negotiated within everyday interactions. Through discursive processes, we build knowledge, constitute identities, and shape collective realities in ways that instantiate power interests. A discursive lens enables us to examine how and why everyday realities are created in such a way that certain interests are privileged over others. In the case of spirituality and career discourses, spirituality typically is rendered as less valuable than career because of its associations with private, home, feminine, and other marginalized aspects in our everyday life. Although these distinctions between spirituality with private and career with public appear oppositional, as Mumby (2000) points out, how we determine what is admissible in the public and private realms is continually contested and reformulated. Mumby questions how public-private is discursively articulated in ways that reproduce power relations or create possibilities for change. Through these rearticulations, individuals (re)construct and enact meanings that (re)form their identities in particular contexts (see Eisenberg, 2001; C. Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998). Identity is plural, changing, and inconsistent in representations of self (Damainakis, 2001). In cases of corporate sponsorships of these rearticulations, we need to question whose interests are served by public-private/career-spirituality reformulations. These interests of dominant groups typically center on social, political, and economic advantages. Without scrutiny of interests, resistance to practices that further subordinate individuals and groups cannot be constructed.

In the case of spirituality and career, it is no coincidence that spirituality has been embraced by corporations. By embracing spirituality, modern corporations can structure our needs, educational contents, use of time, and desires for our future (Deetz, 1992). Deetz says that we have choice but that once we have made our decisions, these paths and thinking then become sedimented and institutionalized to such an extent that our relationships, memberships, and other life aspects are built around and support these choices. This process of corporate colonization is ubiquitous:

> the corporate colonization of other social institutions suppresses competing identity formation and defines the context for an inner colonization whereby the individual forms the self intentionally for work relations. The corporation thus less regulates the identity rather than allows the individual to constitute it on the corporate behalf. The individual provides the construction based on limited conceptual alternatives from primarily the corporate-controlled media, in a context of corporate rewards and sanctions, and for representation in the managerial code. In this process, images enable greater systematic control and instrumental action in corporations through normalization than would be possible in simple authority relations. (Deetz, 1992, pp. 297-298)

Besides encroaching on intrinsically enjoyable activities, corporate colonization of our lives also extends to spirituality. Some researchers have argued that spirituality and the corporate manufactured work community operate as more sophisticated ways of trying to exploit human motivations to belong, find meaning in work, and achieve self-actualization through organizational processes (see Ciulla, 2000). Nadesan (1999a) describes how corporations use spirituality to adapt individuals to new workplace

arrangements. In this adaptation process, populist discourse creates images of individuals as independent agents who fashion their own environments and careers. By choosing the circumstances of their lives, engaging in therapeutic self-help, and achieving intimacy with a higher power, workforce members can attain heightened productivity and self-actualization at work. Nadesan (1999a) says that

> New Age Corporate Spiritualism is therapeutic in that it helps adapt individuals to transformed economic relations. The discourse's effectiveness stems less from its capacity for mind-control, than from its capacity to deflect attention from alternative, populist discourses that hold organizations accountable for undermining work place security, autonomy, and private lives. Individuals who attempt to bring alternative interpretations to bear are represented as taking a victim mindset. (p. 19).

In addition to New Age Corporate Spiritualism, the discourse of Evangelical Christianity (and Evangelical Capitalism in the workplace) "promises to mend the contradictions of public and private, and work and home through its ultimate vision of a new social order" (p. 21). Individuals can learn the techniques, including submission and compliance to traditional gendered roles, as routes to salvation. Individual empowerment comes about through submission to the will of God, rejection of separation of church from state (and public from private), and articulation of beliefs in ways that appeal to mass audiences and convert new followers. Through a personalized relationship with God and adherence to (decontextualized) Biblical precepts, individuals can achieve the kinds of self-discovery and personal growth that can enable them to

sustain themselves during difficult economic times. The challenge for workers is to adapt to—not challenge—economic relations (Nadesan, 1999a).

As spirituality becomes increasingly commercialized and commodified, we see that spirituality situates security within individuals' self-determination and abilities to adjust to, rather than radically alter, the workplace. Ultimately these popular forms of spirituality cannot alleviate the emptiness in our lives because they promote what is in corporations' best interests rather than what is good and true in life and relationships. Ciulla (2000) writes that spirituality at work "attempts to make people feel good and adapt, not address the serious problems of power, conflict, and autonomy that make people feel bad in the first place" (p. 223, italics in original).

An examination of spirituality and career discourses provides understandings of power relationships, identity constructions that serve corporate interests, and means of resisting through locations of internal conflict within competing identities and edges of distinction between spirituality-career that are not clearly demarcated (for discursive approaches, see Deetz, 2001; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). Thus, spirituality and career are both dynamic discursive processes whose meanings are not fixed. A closer look at these discourses enables us to locate points of commonality and contradiction that can be used to develop alternative organizational communication theory and research.

Discourses of Spirituality and Career

Spirituality focuses on "a reality beyond the material" (Daniels, Franz, & Wong, 2000, p. 543) and connotes openness to "an 'unseen order' in the world around us, ... the drive to create wholeness" (Mirvis, 1997, p. 203, italics in the original). Although definitions of spirituality range from personal inner experiences to community-enhancing

behaviors, they also encompass ethical or moral living (see Pokora, 1996, 2001; Sass, 2000; Schmidt-Wilk, Heaton, & Steingard, 2000). In evoking the full array of intrapersonal through group and organizational communication associated with spirituality, researchers also can include emotions in the meaning of spirituality for it is often through our embodied responses to moral dilemmas and troubling situations that we label our beliefs, delineate our values, and determine our tolerance for unjust acts (Hercus, 1999; Jaggar, 1994).

Although definitions of spirituality vary, the key aspects are the desire to find meaning and connection (see Rodriguez, 2001). This dialectic of individual and community (autonomy and interdependence, private and public, agency and communion; see Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) washes away. This dialectic is one reason why it is so difficult to define spirituality because spirituality operates on so many different levels in diverse ways for individuals and groups. Each level—from personal spirituality to community-centered spiritualities—has implications that can collide with discourses of career.

Daniels et al. (2000) state that an "implication of valuing community is the recognition that we do not exist in isolation but are part of a larger entity. Being in community entails certain responsibilities, both toward other people and toward our organizations and environments" (p. 557). These responsibilities involve treating ourselves and others with dignity and respect and serving a vision of lives that transcend their material aspects. In spirituality, we question our lives and live our ideals and values every day, moment-by-moment (Harlos, 2000; Mirvis, 1997). As we "do spirituality" we transcend the mundane minutiae of life (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Pokora, 1996) and work

with others to fulfill our own and others' spirituality (see Graham, 1991; Greenleaf, 1976). Our interactions with others are guided by examination of our souls daily.

We can accomplish some of the work of spirituality alone but cannot fulfill our spirituality without others. Whereas the hallmarks of career are movement (in work content, learning, and advancement), adherence to corporate best interests, and individualism, Harlos (2000) adapts Neal's (1997) spiritual principles to set the cornerstones of spirituality: humility, compassion, and simplicity—values not unlike the ideal managerial climate summarized by Redding (1984) over 15 years ago. In humility, we resist arrogance and presumptions that we have the answers. Krone (2001) reconceptualizes "good work" as that which frees us from egocentricity by connecting us with unseen forces beyond our individual needs and desires. In compassion, we express "a deep concern for others expressed as helpful, kind actions requiring empathy, patience, and courage" (Harlos, 2000, p. 618; see also Kahn, 1996). We enact compassion by caring and being there for others (Frost, Dutton, Worline, & Wilson, 2000) and by deliberately engaging in community-enhancing rather than community-diminishing behaviors (Buzzanell, 1995). Ciulla (2000) comments that we can make a difference in daily acts:

> On a day-to-day basis most jobs can't fill the tall order of making the world better, but particular incidents at work have meaning because you make a valuable contribution or you are able to genuinely help someone in need or you come up with a creative solution to a difficult problem. These meaningful acts are distinctive because people do them with a good will and not for the sake of a paycheck. ... Such moments fill valuable lives. (p. 226)

In simplicity, we focus on substantive, significant issues (Harlos, 2000). We question routines that unnecessarily take time from important activities—activities of giving to others, mentoring, teaching, reflecting, engaging.

In contrast to discourses and practices of spirituality, career connotes the public world of work, employment, and materiality. Career typically prioritizes knowing through technical expertise (see Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Mumby & Stohl, 1996), outward displays of oneself and one's outputs as noteworthy (Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991), and values of work as contributions to external goals (i.e., personal livelihood, need fulfillment, and organizational goals) as well as self expressions and self actualizations (Bernstein, 1997; Ciulla, 2000). Career motivation is pragmatic, with individual action being the principal means of marking achievement of short- and long-term goals. Agency, "the ability of actors (persons, groups, firms, stockholders) to make decisions and to act out of their own interests" (Rousseau & Arthur, 1999, p. 8; see also Marshall, 1989, 1995), forms the basis of traditional career. To act in one's best interests often pits self against others in adversarial relationships as one needs to distinguish oneself, to compete and win in the "survival of the fittest" context (see Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991; Newman, 1993). The construct of career serves organizational needs by presumably motivating workers to signal loyalty, commitment, and promotability.

To "do career" means to serve the employing organization, act as a consumer, and create a vision or Dream in early career phases that can motivate or drive the individual toward employability security if not advancement (see Deetz, 1992, 1995; Levinson, 1978, 1996; W. Scott & Hart, 1989). The Dream is occupationally--not spiritually--oriented (Kittrell, 1999); the Dream also is self--not community--focused (Gothard,

1999). The career and life Dream traditionally is not coupled with recognition that we need others' assistance in actualizing our interests and skills.

However, there has been increased recognition that relationships are essential in career enactment and sensemaking over the last decade (Arthur et al., 1999; Kahn, 1996; Kram, 1996; Parker, 1996). The values of relational career orientations are: nurturing, collaboration, practical rationalities or personal ways of knowing, and multiple ways of achieving goal-accomplishment (see Gallos, 1989; Marshall, 1989; Nadesan, 1999b). These caring relationships are based on qualities aligned with being compassionate. In their attachments to trusted relational partners at work and outside of work (see Parker, 1996), individuals find the inner resources to handle economic uncertainties and the diverse ways in which our careers unfold (see Arthur et al., 1999).

So we see that the seemingly oppositional values and beliefs associated with spirituality and career discourses actually afford opportunities to build on commonalities and ironies. Both constructs center on identity. Both begin with "know thyself" through self-reflection and connection with others. Both require knowledge from public-private realms and technical-practical rationalities. Yet, they remain unlinked in theory and practice. One reason is that organizational communication researchers have not struggled with the intersections of spirituality and career.

Spirituality-Centered Organizational Communication Discourse

Taylor and Trujillo (2001) note that they are "intrigued by the challenges and opportunities" created by spirituality in the workplace discussions (p. 185). Specifically, they write:

> We believe that spirituality offers powerful narratives of purpose that alternately complement and subvert "official" organizational culture and control practices. As a medium of communion with a "higher power," spirituality potentially relativizes organizational authority and forms a competing source of identification for organizational members. Of course, the relationship between spirituality and organization is not only oppositional, because spirituality also provides a reassuring and nurturing narrative that compensates for the transient, fragmented experience of organizational life. ...Organizational communication researchers ... can study spirituality as a form of community and experience that alternately flows with, in opposition to, and parallel to existing organizational structures. (p. 184)

Spirituality can further dislocate organizational communication from unconscious acceptance of managerial voice and stimulate additional work in the problematics of practical rationality, blurred boundaries between organization and society, and questionings about the spatial arrangements of our organizations (Mumby & Stohl, 1996).

Organizational communication theorists and researchers can use the discourses of spirituality and career to facilitate self-knowledge and growth. These compelling discourses in our lives can be reconstructed and revisioned by writing our own and our organizations' spiritual career stories (Arthur et al., 1999; Damainakis, 2001) and our organizations' stories. Damainaskis (2001) says that "the creative writing process reflects a spiritual dimension and experience whereby the artist utilizes other more universal ways of knowing, while continuing to connect self with the world and the

experiences of day-to-day living" (p. 25). In these narratives, our multiple identities and the competing discourses can come into the foreground. As they emerge as prominent, we can better prepare ourselves for individual sense making and collective knowledge construction. Eisenberg (2001) states,

> If the main challenge of living is sense making—developing a workable narrative about the self and the world for use in dealing with existential/ontological uncertainty—it is crucial to ask where people find both their motivations and the needed resources to construct such a narrative. The purpose of this [Eisenberg's] essay is to examine more closely this process and to identify the ways in which people draw upon biological, interpersonal, organizational, societal, and cultural resources in the development of identity. (p. 536)

The constructions of identities imbued with spirituality can provide foundations for living in an uncertain world. For many of us, our foundations crumbled on September 11, 2001. The terrorist attack and attendant uncertainties have prompted questionings about the contradictions between what we profess and what we value.

When spirituality and career discourses collide, we have choices. We can capitalize on opportunities to create change in our work lives. Listening to and acting on these whispers and echoes is a spiritual journey that can unseat dominant career discourses. Spirituality can return us to primitive aspects of our humanness – the celebrations that seasons pass and return, the conviction that an afterlife of some sort exists, the hope that our lives have meaning—that we become part of the earth's remembrance of things past and to come. Because spirituality bridges the individual and

the communal, feelings are central in a spiritually-centered organizational communication discourse. Our challenge, then, is to

> develop new ways of living in a world without foundations. In such a world, it is the structural relations between people that matter most, and for all of our sakes, these relationships ought be entered into with a compassionate spirit. (Eisenberg, 2001, p. 550)

To promote that compassionate spirit and relational approach to organizing, we can derive characteristics of spiritually enriched and spiritually deprived organizations (Witmer, 2001). Spiritually enriched organizations are those in which members express their values, spirituality, and goals; "they cohere and make collective sense of deeply layered structures that span space and time. This sense-making acknowledges and ultimately celebrates human spirituality in order to capitalize on it for personal betterment and organizational survival" (p. 9).

Similarly, Krone (2001) refashions some central organizational communication constructs through utilization of creation spirituality (i.e., a spiritual journey that enables first world people to revitalize our spirits, connect with others, and live our spirituality in our everyday lives). She concludes: "More fundamentally, re-framing organizational communication theory through spirituality humanizes our research agenda, and lays the groundwork for transforming organizational communication research, itself, into work that is good" (p. 32).

In conclusion, spirituality-centered communication can sustain the tensions between spirituality and career to derive more humane theory and practice. Ultimately, the spirituality-centered career is threatening to corporations because this career locates

time, agency, meaning, and identity within a combination of the individual, a higher power or value in life, and community. If individuals truly are centered spiritually, then their identities and their spirituality cannot be coopted by the organization. They may love their work, enjoy accomplishing work goals, and spend time thinking about challenging work problems—but they engage in these work behaviors with conscious choice. They challenge work-life bifurcations with innovative responses based on their own central life interests and community needs (Butler & Waldroop, 1999; Friedman, Christensen, DeGroot, 1998). They recognize that the basis of their decision making is humility, compassion, and simplicity. If they find themselves serving the corporation and the status quo to the detriment of their spirits and other people, then they either work toward changing the system or they leave. They realize that if the basis of their decisions is within their souls and their relationships with others, then their choices may mean job loss and fewer material resources, but greater flexibility in what they can and would do.

Kirkwood (1994) worried that spiritual talk might set up spirit/matter or spiritual/nonspiritual life dualisms that can minimize the materials concerns of our lives and those who choose not to emphasize the spiritual. Yet, there is no reason to promote or adhere to such a bifurcation. The spiritual is a root process underlying what we do whether we call it spirituality or some other term. If we focus less on the external trappings of career and more on the inner and community-enhancing processes, we have an opportunity to build communication understandings and practices that truly are innovative. Through spirituality, we can transform the communicative processes in our workplace as well as address our ongoing needs for meaning.

Endnotes

[1]As a result of these employment relationships characterized by exchange and attendant dislocations (by time and space), many workers began to question their lives, resource allocations, and personal allegiances (Bernstein, 1997; Ciulla, 2000; Saltzman, 1991; Schor, 1991). Not only were those who lost their jobs challenging their assumptions about life, but also those who conducted individual and mass terminations had to make sense of their participation in these acts. Wright and Barling (1998) found that downsizers experienced social and organizational isolation, decreased personal well-being and family functioning, and increased searches for meaning.

In the midst of this self-questioning, Nadesan (1999b) says that corporations offered constancy: "corporate identities offer stable, paternalistic presences–so-called community structures–that transcend the individual and therefore provide the individual a locus for identification" (p. 35). Nadesan (1999b) notes that "post-modern conditions engender multiple possibilities for the proliferation of heterogeneous social discourses and the concomitant creative exploration of identities, [while] they also generate angst as individuals strive vainly to provide secure foundations for their identity" (p. 31). Deetz (1992, 1995) notes that individuals have shifted identities to work and career without realizing the full implications of these processes. He states that the origin of identity has changed from family and community organizations to a more constraining identity that serves corporate rather than individual interests. These practices are detrimental to our striving for democratic processes in our workplace and community lives.

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